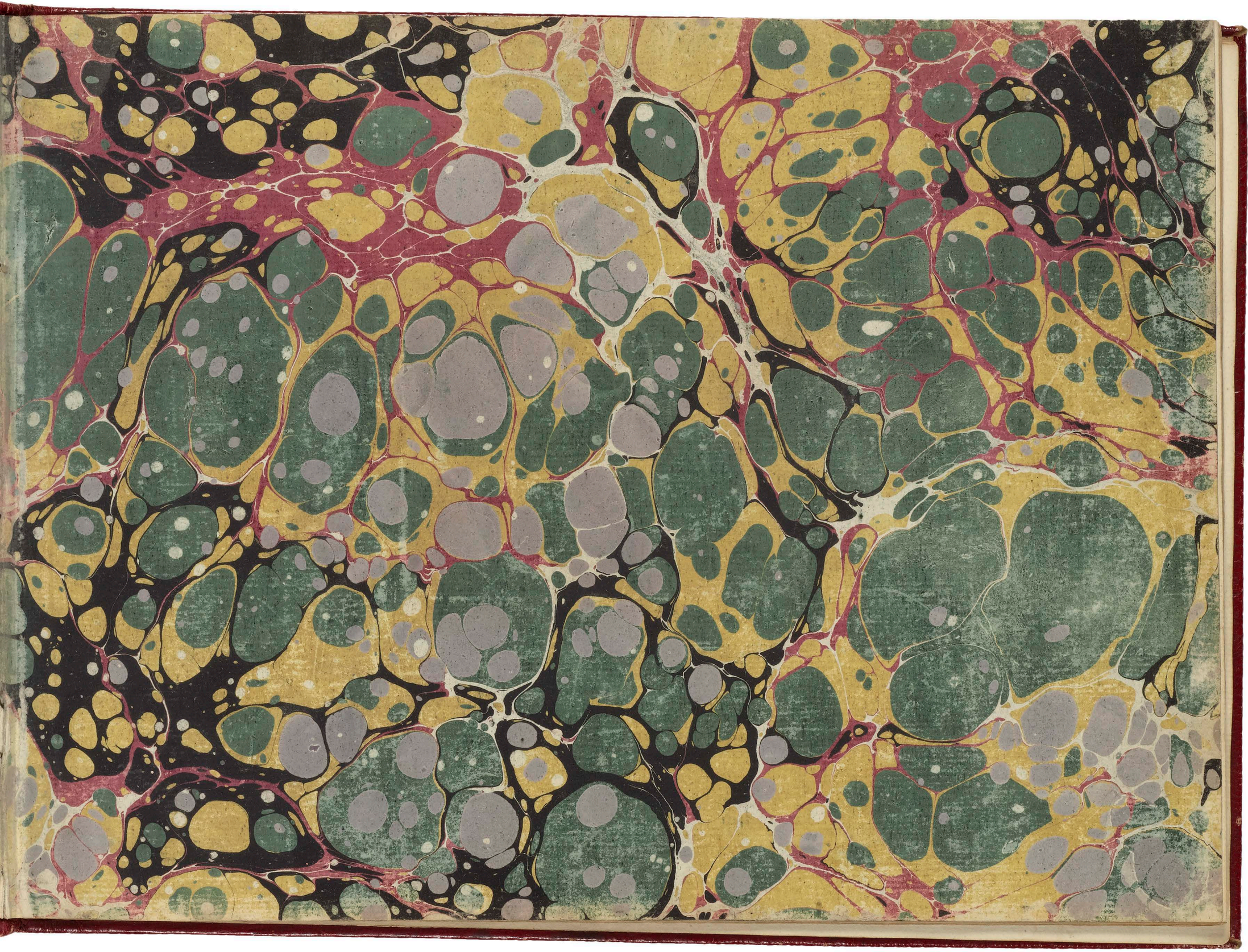
DEUS NOBISCUM
QUIS CONTRA
John Roland Abbey
J.P. BADELEY 1920
R M
Oak Spring Garden Library
Oak Spring
Paul Mellon



10083

Newton Park

in Somersetshire

A Seat of

William Gore Langton Esq.r M.P.

Introduction.

Sir,

The following pages contain my opinion concerning the farther improvement of the beautiful scenery at Newton-park, or rather the outline of a general plan, with my reasons for suggesting it; but the actual detail can only be marked from time to time upon the spot, since no plan on paper can describe those peculiar circumstances in which the inequality of the ground or the situation of a single tree, may require a deviation from lines described on the map at the end of these pages.

Some effects of improvement are attempted to be shewn in the sketches, but if it be true that the highly finished scenes of a Garden are seldom fit objects for painting: the neatness of Newton park can never be represented with justice by my rude pencil, yet I trust the sketches will serve to elucidate the principles on which I have founded my opinions of improvement, & with thanks for the opportunity you have given me of thus leaving them on record at a place of so much interest and importance,

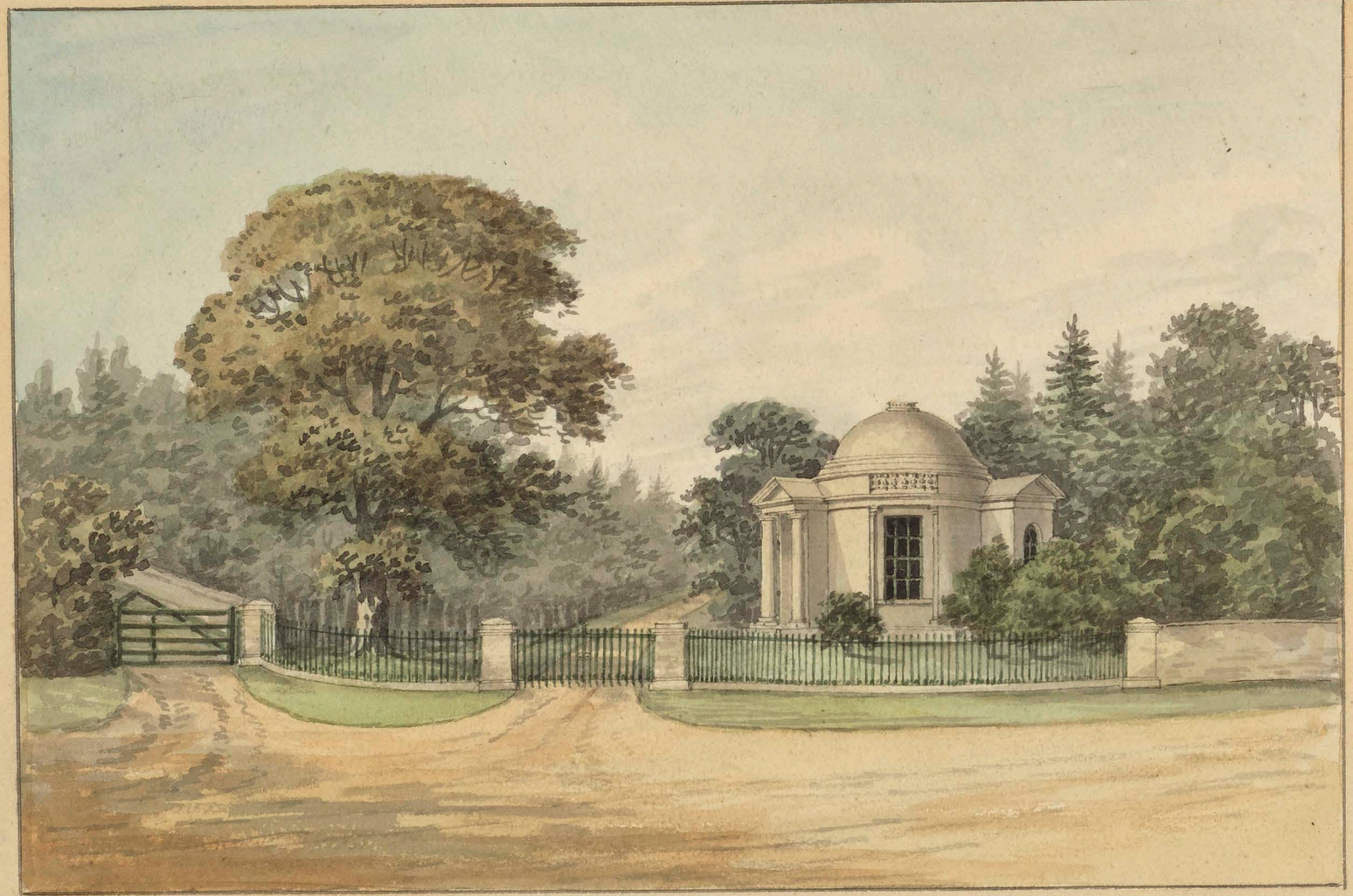
I have the honour to be Sir Your most obedient humble Servant H Repton

On the Spot in November - 1796.

Plans done at Hare Street May - 1797.

Character and Situation.

A large elegant mansion situated in the midst of an extensive and valuable estate must always posses a degree of importance; yet it is amazing how much this may be lessened or increased by the management of the grounds, and in the present instance, altho' the great road from Bath to Bristol passes for many miles thro' this property, yet few of the visitors of those cities (unless personally acquainted with the proprietor) have any idea that such a place as Newton park exists in that neighbourhood. There may be a difference of opinion whether it is most desirable to conceal all view of the house? or to make an ostentatious display of it? but surely there can be but one opinion, whether improvements of any kind ought to be seen or not seen by the public, and amongst these the most obvious and useful improvement is, to bring the park in contact with the high road, to make an easy line of access and approach to the house, and to mark that such a thing exists altho' it may not be visible from the road. This forms the first object of improvement, the second relates to the disposition of woods and trees to extend the character of park-scenery beyond its present boundary, and the management of the water in the valley constitutes the third. yet such are the natural beauties of the situation, and so neatly kept are the grounds near the house, that to a common eye it would appear presumptuous to suggest improvement in a spot which Mr. Brown is supposed to have finished with great attention: there are however many circumstances which would increase and heighten the interest both of the character and situation of Newton park, which will be obvious when pointed out and described.



The Approach.

The present entrance of the park is from a road little frequented except by coal carts, and the lodges have been placed with a view to suit those who come from the east, and also those who come from the west; but like most things that are made to suit two different purposes, they are properly adapted to neither. I have therefore described on the map and on the ground, two distinct entrances into the park; one from Bath and Bristol; and the other from Wells; both uniting into one road at a gate which makes a natural division of the lawn. The present entrance is marked by an iron gate betwixt two lodges, or rather cottages; and it has often been doubted whether a double lodge of this kind can ever be necessary or proper. I am of opinion that there may be circumstances, either in the character of the place, or the situation of the entrance, which may require more length of architectural display than that of a single lodge; but in such cases this effect is better produced by an arch betwixt two lodges, or at least by ornamented piers to connect them with each other, for two buildings must always appear disjoined, and want unity of design, if they are only connected by an iron rail, because at a little distance it becomes invisible. This kind of extended architectural façade at the entrance of a park, seems applicable to situations in an open country, or where it is seen from a great distance; because in such cases a single cottage would be too insignificant, but the proposed entrance from the Bath and Bristol road, seems rather to require a building which by its character can neither be mistaken for a mere cottage, nor for a garden pavilion; and this intention I think my ingenious friend Mr. Nash has realized in the design N.º I which without more architectural ornament than is consistent with the character of the house will sufficiently draw the attention and mark the entrance both from the Bath and Bristol roads.

N.° 11.

The Avenue.

Having deliver'd my opinion* very fully on the general subject of avenues; I shall only observe that this is one of the instances in which I conceive that more beauty may be obtained by destroying than preserving the avenue: but as it is impossible to obliterate its effect in looking along it, I shall consider its treatment from the point of sight where it is most likely to be viewed; and from whence it is the most capable of improvement, viz. from the approach where it looks like a veil drawn across the park to hide its inequality. Having marked the trees during the winter, when I could see what was behind them I shall describe my reasons for cutting down or leaving each by the help of the annexed sketch, in which they are all numbered. I suppose the farther end of the avenue to remain, as forming in appearance a great mass of wood; and N.° 1 and 2 are part of the trees left with that intent. N.° 3, 4, and 5, are removed to open to the lawn above; N.° 6, 7, and 8, having a thick mass behind, will shew their stems of a different colour to those which have lawn behind them, and N.° 9 is removed to break the line, N.° 10 having by accident been blown out of its erect position has less the artificial effect of an avenue tree, and with N.° 11 forms a natural groupe of two trees leaning from each other. From N.° 12 to N.° 19, inclusive should all be removed to shew the bank and trees beyond, and altho' I did not mark N.° 15 of which I have also left a stump on the sketch, yet it is obvious that the opening ought to be bold and without any such obstruction however respectable the tree may be, and therefore I have only left N.° 20, to stand single, which leaves an ample space betwixt the end of the avenue, and another large single tree beyond the compass of this sketch and nearer to the house.

*In the first printed volume of my works.

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N°. III.

View from the house.

Sketch N°. III. represents the view taken from the entrance front of the house, and serves to explain the principle of its improvement. A Love of Unity, being prevalent in the human mind, it is natural to suggest a plantation for the purpose of uniting the two woods on the hill, and filling up the apparent chasm at A. yet this is a thing very difficult to effect, because it requires the laspe of half a centuty to make a new plantation assi-milate with large old trees: it therefore becomes advisable to consider whether improvement may not be more readily effected by other expedients, and instead of filling up the chasm which would ultimately hide so much of the summit, I rather advise opening the lawn as it trends towards the south, and planting beyond to shew that the wood sweeps over the hill, on the apex of which a building would be both useful and ornamental, as command-ing views very different from, and more extensive than any other spot in the grounds.

This kind of bare lawn between two woods, makes a more pleasing horizon than an uni-form boundary of plantation, which is too apt to give an air of confinement, and tho' such a circumstance may not always be advisable towards the north, because it brings the ground in apparent contact with a more sombre sky, yet towards the south it has generally a good effect, because the contrast of the sky and lawn is more distinct, and gives an air of cheer-fulness as well as freedom to the landscape.

The height of the hill may be increased in appearance by the plantation in the corner which is described on the map and on the drawing by the letter B. and this plantation will have the further effect of making a sweeping continuity of wood from the top of the hill down into the valley.

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№ IIII

The House.

The pleasure ground at the back of the house with the walks round the water and towards the old tower, and the garden, have been finished under the direction of Mr. Brown and kept with such neatness, that little is left for me to improve; except that I think the fashion of placing a house on a bare lawn is too often attended with want of comfort and baldness of effect, and where as in the present instance the ground immediately near the house is defended from cattle, there can be no objection to such an accompaniment of flowering shrubs under the windows, as may hide part of the basement story, and spread perfume thro' the apartments in summer when the windows are thrown open.

I have further recommended some trees of taller growth to be planted betwixt the house and the wings, to hide the low connecting wall in the view from the side rooms, and also to improve the general effect of the house in front; because in coming into the front court, the sky appears immediately over the corridore, and the wings want connection with the body of the house. In the sketch N. IV. I have supposed these trees to be grown to a sufficient height to answer their intention, and this mixture of trees to

to fill up the chasms in architecture is generally pleasing.

The Water.

The cheerful effect of water is so universally admired, that few places can be deemed perfect without the appearance of it in some shape or other, yet to the eye of taste it becomes more or less pleasing, in proportion as its form is more or less natural; for altho' it may be impossible to preserve the same level thro' the whole length of a valley and altho' the mind is even convinced of that impossibility, yet the eye may be deceived into the belief that it is effected, so long as the interference of Art is well disguised.

Three distinct pools, or pieces of water exist at present, and these are formed by three different heads; I am at a loss to conceive how Mr. Brown could be satisfied with having made three pools without any attempt to disguise the ends of any one, or to aim at an apparent union of the waters, because the love of unity is in no instance more evident than in the general desire to lay two or more ponds into one piece of water.

As the greatest improvement at Newton park will arise from the proper ma=
=nagement of the water, to produce an apparent continuity, I shall describe the seve=
=ral modes in which I propose to disguise those efforts of Art, by which five distinct pieces of water on different levels, may be made to seem a continuation of the same river flowing thro' the park.

N°. V.

The first pool.

Sketch N:V. represents this small pond as it appears from the walk acrofs the dam and it is supposed to be taken in a summer evening when every thing is in shadow except the surface of the water which is at that time peculiarly brilliant: but as a small pool unruffled by the wind, is a mirror in which all the surrounding objects are strongly reflected, it is peculiarly requisite to attend to its banks, that we may not see duplicates of ugly objects. The old stone wall at the edge of the water would be unneceſsary as a fence if a channel were dug a little deeper and then instead of seeing this wall reflected, the water would become illumined by the western sky, or occasionally some cattle would enliven the scene by standing on a gravel bank just below the water's edge, which might be laid on purpose to entice them. A water course might be dug as the outward fence to the wood, and a wilder walk continued acrofs a plank bridge to a seat in the dark recefs of the valley, these would all become pleasing circumstances in themselves, and being doubled by reflections in the water, we should increase the number of agreeable objects, instead of disgusting ones; and by terminating this pool with two channels of different breadth, there is a sort of intricacy created which tho' it may not absolutely contribute to join this first pool with the second, yet it gives ideal extent to the upper water: and reconciles the mind in some degree to its abrupt termination at the head.

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N.° VI.

The second and third Pools.

With regard to the second piece of water, altho' neither the upper nor lower ends are attempted to be disguised, yet as the banks are richly cloathed with trees, and from its curvature the two ends are seldom seen at once, I shall suggest no other improvements than those described on the spot, such as clearing away many trees which have outgrown their situation. But the third pool is remarkably defective; the upper end finishes in a very narrow creek or channel, which gives it no apparent connection with the water above; if instead of one channel the centre were filled in, and planted betwixt two channels, of only the same size as the creek or even less, the water would seem to flow round an island and thus its termination would be best disguised. At the lower end of the water is a dam planted with fir trees, and these being reflected on the surface with the light betwixt their open stems, the artificial mechanism becomes distinctly visible.

Instead of tall firs a few brushy alders and thorns judiciously disposed on the head and an opening left near one side, would produce the effect of intricacy, and the expanse of water would be more considerable, because the tall trees rob the surface of so much brilliancy: this improvement is exemplified in the sketch N.° VI.

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Water continued.

Few pieces of artificial water can be produced without a head or dam, which it is the business of the Landscape Gardener to disguise or conceal, yet this will be attempted in vain if the ground be seen lower than the surface of the water, for tho' the eye may be reconciled to two pieces of water on different levels, because it is more difficult to judge of water than of land, yet if it sees a large pool raised above the surface of an adjoining meadow, the Art by which the pool is formed must ever be disgusting, and here I will do Mr. Brown the justice to observe, that in no instance have I ever seen him inattentive to this consideration. When he designed the pools N.o 1. 2. and 3. the road to the house came along the avenue, and therefore the ground below the water was never shewn; but since the approach has been altered, we are admitted (if I may use the expression) behind the scenes, and our surprize and pleasure at viewing the expanse of water, is lessened by seeing the rivulet and the manner in which that has been dam'd up to form the several pools, which we might otherwise have supposed to be an ample river. This streamlet has unfortunately been made more conspicuous and more unnatural, by a number of little stops or weirs, which alternately produce small canals, and trifling cascades, in the manner I have represented them in sketch N.o VII. The general effect of continuing the water along this valley is shewn by removing the slide, but as the Fall of the ground will require two different levels, I propose disguising the intermediate dam in a manner different from any of the other. This sketch also shews in some degree the effect of a proposed plantation on the hill C.

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N°. VIII.

Conclusion.

As the approach from Wells described on the map must cross the valley; and as the proposed waters N: 4, and 5, cannot be made on the same level; it is advisable to disguise the dam by the fasçade of a bridge, which will contribute more than any thing to the character of a river flowing thro' the whole of the valley: but this will not be compleatly effected, if any part of the low ground be visible from the approach, and therefore the road from Bath &c, is made to pass round the hill in such a direction, as not to shew the water till it is seen to the greatest advantage, and the plantation at the head will conceal all the ground below it.

In the proposed approach from Wells, the whole place is displayed under circumstances of grandeur, which my small sketch N: VIII. can very inadequately represent. But I shall conclude these remarks with an attempt to pourtray in one general view, many of the improvements already hinted. The continuation of the water with the bridge-like-dam. The manner of disguising the other dam by brushwood instead of tall firs. The breaking the avenue and opening the lawn above the house, on which a temple is placed, that marks the Property and from whence the most extensive and varied prospect is to be expected. and since there is no part of the park where the house and grounds will look so advantageously as from this Wells: approach, when the water shall cease to offend by its visible and abrupt termination, I consider it peculiarly desirable that there should be some temptation for passing over this hill, and the road to Wells will be a sufficient inducement.

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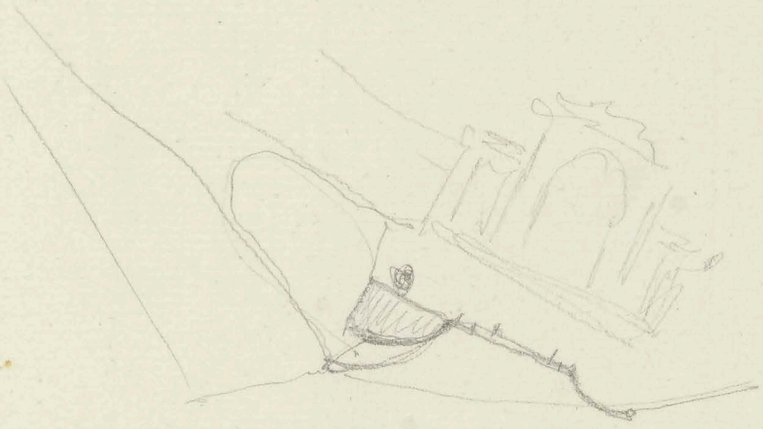
Globe Inn
from
BATH.
to BRISTOL.

A
B
C
Kitchen Garth
1
2
3
4
5
NEWTON
Church
CORSTON.
Church
To WELLS.
from BATH.
Glebe Inn
to BRISTOL.



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